

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 27, 2015

The Honorable David Michaels, PhD, MPH
Assistant Secretary of Labor
Occupational Safety and Health Administration
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room S2315
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Assistant Secretary Michaels,

We write to urge the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to create a National Emphasis Program to address occupational hazards faced by poultry processing and meatpacking workers. We believe this will help reduce injuries from the serious health and safety hazards associated with poultry processing and meatpacking jobs, which currently experience high rates of injury and illness.

As you know, repetitive motions, excessively fast line speeds, lack of restroom and rest breaks, knife cuts, slippery floors, hazardous chemicals, dangerous equipment, and exposure to high noise levels are among the many serious safety and health hazards that poultry and meat processing workers face. Employees that handle live birds are sometimes exposed to poultry feces and have even a higher risk for disease.

Moreover, workers are under enormous pressure to not report injuries, leading to underreporting, a systemic problem across the country. The risks facing poultry processing and meatpacking workers have become a national challenge, with dangerous work sites touching nearly every region across the country.

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicates that injuries are much more prevalent among poultry workers than employees in any other industry. In 2013, poultry workers were injured at a rate 1.5 times higher than all workers and meatpacking workers at a rate twice as high. Musculoskeletal disorders are of particular concern among these workers as the incidence rate of occupational illness cases reported in the poultry industry in 2011 and 2012 has remained high, at more than five times the average for all United States industries.

In fact, according to a March 2015 National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) evaluation at a poultry processing plant in Maryland, researchers found that 76 percent of the nearly 200 employees tested had abnormal results from a nerve conduction test. A staggering 34 percent had evidence of carpal tunnel syndrome, 6 times more than the general adult population.

A separate evaluation conducted in April 2013 by NIOSH at a South Carolina poultry plant found that forty-two percent of participants had evidence of carpal tunnel syndrome. In that same

report, forty-one percent of participants worked in jobs above the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists' threshold limit value for hand activity and force. Furthermore, your agency reported just last month the latest penalties against Case Farms Processing Inc. for 16 violations at the chicken processor's facility in Ohio. The safety failures resulted in two serious injuries to workers while they cleaned machines, including a minor worker who had his left leg amputated from the knee down and a 24-year-old employee who lost two fingertips.

The need for enforcement from your agency is critical to protecting these workers from serious injury. We believe the high rate of injuries and the poor safety practices warrant special intervention from OSHA. Time has come for a national solution. A National Emphasis Program would provide much-needed heightened scrutiny to the poultry and meatpacking industries. A program of this nature will provide the oversight needed to address the serious hazards faced by these workers.

Specifically, we urge OSHA to pay particular attention to the musculoskeletal hazards associated with line speed, force, and repetition; employer practices that discourage workers from reporting injuries; retaliation against injured workers; and the appropriateness of medical care provided to workers with symptoms of musculoskeletal injuries.

Additionally, given the significant concentration of poultry and meatpacking plants in states with OSHA approved state plans spread across the country from Iowa to North Carolina and Virginia, it is important for OSHA to create a National Emphasis Program that takes the necessary steps to ensure those working in these states' poultry and meat packing industry are protected as well.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We believe OSHA's focus on these industries will help ensure that employers identify and eliminate serious workplace hazards and provide safe workplaces for their workers.

Sincerely,



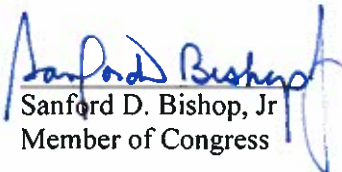
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Member of Congress



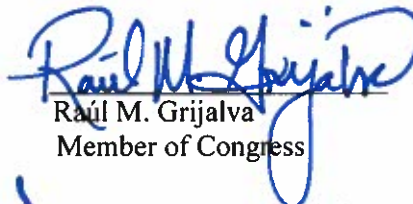
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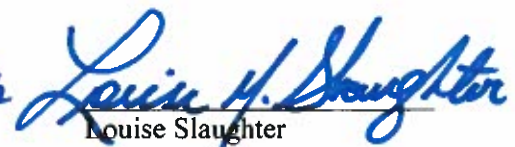
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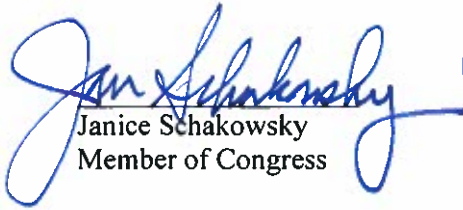
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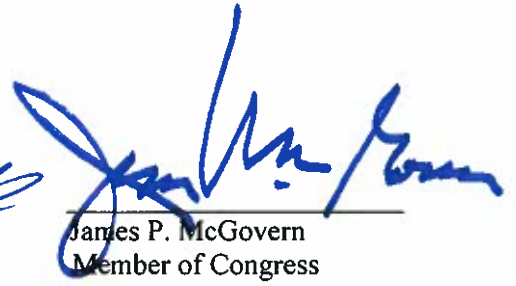
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